CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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FINAL RECORD OF THE SEVEN HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-FOURTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 14 August 1997, at 10 a.m.

President: Mrs. Krasnohorská (Slovakia)

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I declare open the 774th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

On my list of speakers today I have the representatives of New Zealand, Iraq, Australia - speaking as Special Coordinator on anti-personnel mines - and Kazakhstan. I give the floor to the representative of New Zealand, Ambassador Pearson.

Mr. PEARSON (New Zealand): Madam President, may I first congratulate you on assuming the presidency and assure you of my full cooperation in the exercise of your duties?

It is both an honour and a pleasure to address you for the first time today, particularly as New Zealand's first Ambassador for Disarmament. I want to take this opportunity to thank those colleagues for the warm welcome extended to me since my arrival. I shall do my best to cooperate and to work constructively with all of you.

New Zealanders care deeply about the need for disarmament. We have participated in more than enough international conflicts this century to have a real appreciation of what is at stake and what this Conference is expected to achieve. In striving for a world that is free of nuclear arms and other no less awesome weapons of mass destruction, New Zealanders are looking to this Conference to deliver that imperative. So far this year, our record has been one of deadlock and inflexibility. It is a situation for which we must assume responsibility and one that all of us will be reflecting upon seriously. This state of affairs cannot continue indefinitely. The time has come for some creative new thinking. While I understand that the curtains in this chamber remain closed for most of the time, as a new arrival let me assure delegates that there is a real world outside. It is demanding that we make progress and there is no understanding for the fact that we appear to be suffocating in process rather than in outcomes. We all know that there has never been a more auspicious time for us to move forward.

Madam President, let me assure you and delegates that New Zealand will continue to search for the middle ground in moving ahead, because clearly that is the only way we shall be able to re-engage. We are ready now, for example, to start work on fissile cut-off negotiations in a way that takes into account differing views on its scope. We have an open mind on how we might pursue other initiatives before us. The New Zealand Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Right Honourable Don McKinnon, outlined in detail our approach earlier this year in this Conference. I would commend delegates to reflect on those proposals again.

We have consistently urged this Conference to begin a dialogue on nuclear disarmament. We advocate this should be a two-track approach - a preparatory track and a negotiating track. In doing so, we consider our priorities should be, first, to identify those proposals on which we can add value now. Secondly, we should determine those areas where we can add value in the future. Finally, we should seek to establish how we can best support progress to be undertaken by the nuclear-weapons States themselves. We are not looking to constrain work in this Conference by imposing time bindings or

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tactical linkages on nuclear or conventional weapons. We do not think that is a productive way to proceed. Working for the reasonable middle ground is the only way we want to see progress in addressing all disarmament imperatives. And, we consider it is achievable. It is a challenge that we shall continue to pursue.

While we have stalled in our tracks so far this year, the appointment of the four special coordinators are steps that should not be undervalued. This is a good moment for us to revisit issues such as membership, functions and the agenda. This Conference has to come to grips also with what it can realistically achieve on landmines. With the appointment of the four special coordinators, we know that these issues are in capable hands and I look forward to cooperating with them. I wish to touch on some of these institutional aspects today.

On improved and effective functioning, let me say at the outset, as others have done, that it would be wrong to confuse any review of procedures with the separate question of membership. Similarly, consideration of wider membership should not be predicated by concerns over functioning. That would result in the tail wagging the dog. Certainly, the Conference on Disarmament is having to adjust to its increased size, but we are confident this is manageable and will be in the future. If our procedures are not capable of delivering our outcomes, then we should not hesitate to change them. This is in our gift. The issue of consensus, however, appears to be set in concrete in this Conference. Whether it is possible to make a distinction between procedural issues and those of substance is clearly problematic. The only way to do so would be to define the parameters in each case and then design a more flexible formula for dealing with procedural decision-making. We would agree with others that the problems we have seen so far this year are as much matters of policy difference as shortcomings in our system of operation. But, that cannot be the excuse for avoiding the search for innovative alternatives. The problems we face are not unique. New Zealand wishes to see NGOs participate in this Conference to the fullest extent possible. While some might argue that the present arrangements are not unreasonable, we would welcome greater input from NGO delegations. New Zealand is amongst those countries which already consult widely and productively with these organizations. There are some other matters of process on which I would like to comment. For example, we would not be opposed to time limits on speeches. We do not, however, see the need to constrain ourselves by adopting motions of closure. Open-ended consultations are proving to be valuable because they enhance transparency, but one wonders whether this setting is conducive to informality. I join others in asking whether there is not a more suitable room for these consultations where we can at least see each other. With respect to the role of the presidency, we believe the present term is fine. More important, however, is that the powers of the presidency appear to have become eroded. We would strongly support moves for these to be restored. We would go further in suggesting that the President should have the right, for example, on a "best endeavours" basis, to consult parties with widely differing views in an effort to facilitate a consensual outcome.

New Zealand has warmly welcomed the ongoing efforts of the Secretary-General to reform the United Nations. We are encouraged by his

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clarification that the July package of proposals in the disarmament area are designed to jump-start one of the United Nations' more important areas of activity. Indeed, we would have wished to see more far-reaching reforms proposed in this area. There is much for member States to work through before the start of the next General Assembly session. And we must also start thinking about the future work of this Conference in the light of the reform process. This body should look also at implementing output-driven reforms. And it should take the initiative rather than wait to have the changes imposed from outside. When one looks at our group structures, there are few who would not acknowledge that we are operating with machinery from a bygone age. We are not suggesting this should be dismantled forthwith, but let us not rule out change. Our experience with group consultations is that they are extremely valuable. Other, so-called like-minded, groups will operate independently and do so successfully. Inevitably, like-mindedness in disarmament will differ on an issue-by-issue basis. But there is no reason why this Conference and its President should not recognize the existence of other coalitions on occasions when they themselves wish to speak collectively.

On questions relating to our agenda, we would want to join calls to reshape this into a generic format and one that is more durable in time. Do we really need to revisit the agenda every year when our programme of work also allows us to set priorities for our sessions on an annual basis? Disarmament issues are not resolved in tidy annual packages, nor is this a factory for mass-producing treaties. We would be keen to explore the adoption of a thematic and balanced agenda which has a longer lifespan and can deliver the necessary flexibility for us to get on with the real work.

New Zealand considers also that this Conference should take more fully into account consensus-driven calls for action from the United Nations General Assembly. Our rules and procedures require this, yet we seem to be immune to this expectation. We should address this shortcoming in a more responsible way and in a manner that is in step with today's world. This leads me to wonder whether the Conference should consider becoming pro-active in explaining its business to the wider community. There is an image problem to be addressed and this is an organization that is not as widely understood or as appreciated as it should be, I suggest.

Turning to the consideration of future membership, I want to reiterate that New Zealand fully supports the principle that this should be open-ended. We do not hold to notions of what may or may not be the optimum size. The Conference on Disarmament cannot claim representational exclusivity when it is dealing with issues that are global. We would support further consideration of how enlargement might reasonably be managed, perhaps in a phased way. We would be opposed to preconditions being made. But it is not unreasonable that we should ensure a representative geographical mix. We should bear in mind, too, the expectation that applicants have demonstrated a commitment to the work of this Conference. And, in our considerations, we should be mindful of the dates of existing applications.

I want to take this opportunity today to reflect on the question of landmines. New Zealand is one of many countries, both within this Conference and outside it, that is committed to the Ottawa Process. This process has

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real momentum behind it. And it meets the overwhelming international imperative for early action: something this Conference, unfortunately, has been unable to deliver. The Ottawa treaty will open the window for considering other action on landmines in the future. We are open-minded as to how this might be pursued, either as an annex to the treaty, or in the context of the Inhumane Weapons Convention or within this Conference. We shall await with interest the interim report from the Special Coordinator and any recommendations that may be made for further consideration of this issue in the CD itself. In considering what role this body might play in the future, we must ensure that it will reinforce and not dilute in any way the ban on landmines. Any action must be consistent with, and not merely "complementary" to, the Ottawa treaty. There would be strong objections from within this chamber and from outside should any subsequent action in the CD have the effect of undermining the Ottawa treaty or its humanitarian imperatives. Options that might offer the convenience of à la carte solutions are not the way to proceed, we believe, and could risk undermining the integrity of this body. Finally, while we have problems to resolve and challenges that we cannot avoid, this body has proved in the past that it can meet these. New Zealand is not pessimistic about its future. My appointment as New Zealand's first Ambassador for Disarmament is evidence of that commitment and that confidence.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the representative of New Zealand for his statement and the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of Iraq, Ambassador Al-Tikriti.

Mr. AL-TIKRITI (Iraq) (translated from Arabic): Madam President, allow me at the outset to offer you my best wishes for success in your high office. We have full confidence in your skill and wisdom, and our delegation will cooperate closely to ensure the success of the proceedings.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the former Presidents of the Conference on their praiseworthy efforts to move our work forward. I would also like to welcome the distinguished Ambassadors of Chile and New Zealand. The Conference will certainly benefit from their wisdom and experience and from their valuable contribution to our work in the CD. I wish to assure them of my delegation's cooperation to ensure the smooth progress of the CD, whose success is of importance to us all. I wish the distinguished Ambassadors who have left us every success in both their public and private lives. Our Conference greatly appreciates their outstanding contributions and achievements.

Given the developments in international relations in the last decade and the beginning of the current decade, all members of the international community must recognize that it is essential for all States to participate on an equal footing in promoting the common interests of mankind. Their participation must be based on the provisions of the United Nations Charter, the rules of international law and the principles of justice and equity. The achievement of that goal unquestionably depends on the adoption of measures to promote disarmament on an equitable and objective basis that guarantees the natural rights of States to security, peace and respect for their sovereignty and independence.

(Mr. Al-Tikriti, Iraq)

Our Conference can point to two major achievements in the recent past: the Convention on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty. Despite the great difficulties and challenges which confronted the Conference during that period, a steadfast determination and desire to succeed overcame the difficulties and challenges and the Conference took a giant step forward on the path towards the elimination of weapons of mass destruction and nuclear disarmament. We are fully confident that the Conference on Disarmament can make further progress along that path if the disinterested political will to do so exists. The international community has placed its confidence in this Conference and we must take care not to undermine that confidence. While the serious nature of the Conference and the wisdom and experience of its members inspire us with optimism, the amount of time wasted since the beginning of the session in argument and discussion without reaching agreement on the programme of work fills us with disappointment and regret. I agree with my colleagues who have described it as a dialogue of the deaf, because since the beginning of the session we have only been able to adopt the agenda and appoint the four special coordinators. Although that was a step forward, it falls short of the Conference's aspirations and abilities. The time has come for the Conference to take its responsibilities more seriously and we are confident of achieving the desired results if, as I said, the disinterested political will to do so exists.

With regard to the programme of work of the Conference, our delegation forms part of the Group of 21 which submitted the proposal contained in document CD/1462 of 5 June 1997. We view the proposal as a commendable move by the Group to facilitate the proceedings and as a sound basis for agreement. Our delegation is pleased to state that we are willing to work with all parties, keeping an open mind and motivated by a desire to advance the cause of world peace for the benefit of all. But we also feel that the text should be acceptable, practical and balanced and take account of the views and concerns of all Conference members, since this would create an atmosphere of trust and thwart the efforts of those who are endeavouring to obstruct the work of the Conference on Disarmament and prevent it from achieving the lofty goals for which it was established.

Iraq considers that the priorities established in the Final Document of the first special session of the United Nations General Assembly devoted to disarmament, held in 1978, are still valid. That historic document gave top priority to nuclear disarmament, since nuclear weapons constitute the greatest danger to mankind and to the survival of civilization. The nuclear States parties to the NPT bear a special responsibility in that area, and our delegation therefore strongly supports the establishment of the committee which is to be responsible for agenda item 1, entitled "Cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament". We are aware, given the depth and scope of this subject, that the desired results cannot be attained overnight. However, the establishment of this committee is, in our view, the first step towards achieving a convention on comprehensive nuclear disarmament.

Iraq considers that a pragmatic approach should be adopted to disarmament issues, particularly the issue of comprehensive nuclear disarmament. Moreover, as the collective security of States is indissociable from the goal of world peace, the Conference should give more attention to

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issues relating to international security within a new framework and on the basis of effective measures. The various aspects of international peace and security are to be achieved through disarmament and confidence-building measures, including the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones as a global project encompassing all States belonging to different regions with the aim of achieving a nuclear-weapon-free world in accordance with article VII of the NPT.

The Middle East is one of the regions that the international community is trying to free from the nuclear nightmare and from all weapons of mass destruction in accordance with General Assembly resolutions and paragraph 14 of Security Council resolution 687 (1991), which provides for the establishment of a zone free from weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons, and all missiles for their delivery. Although more than six years have passed since the adoption of this resolution, we have seen no serious move or action to implement this paragraph.

As I have already said, our view of the issue of comprehensive nuclear disarmament is realistic, open-minded and impartial. Pending achievement of this lofty humanitarian goal, we view the provision of unconditional security assurances by the nuclear-weapon States to the non-nuclear-weapon States as one of the main concerns of the peoples and States in the latter category. Indeed, it represents the minimum requirement of the non-nuclear-weapon States. Once this goal is achieved, the Conference must press ahead with its tasks. The States in question have a fair and legitimate right to demand such guarantees, having voluntarily renounced the nuclear option when the NPT came into force in 1968. But the nuclear-weapon States have not fulfilled their obligations under article VI of the Treaty, contenting themselves with unilateral statements. If we examine such statements from the legal point of view, we find them unreliable, inadequate, fundamentally unstable and non-binding in legal terms. Furthermore, they are all conditional and add nothing new to the principle of individual and collective self-defence laid down in the Charter of the United Nations. In addition, Security Council resolutions 255 (1968) and 984 (1995) have not provided a practical solution capable of dispelling the fears and doubts of the non-nuclear-weapon States regarding their security. The two resolutions merely provide positive assurances, most of which are already contained in the Charter of the United Nations. Our delegation therefore thinks that the time has come for the Conference on Disarmament to take a serious, objective and impartial look at the subject and to re-establish the Ad Hoc Committee with a view to negotiating a binding and verifiable instrument under which nuclear-weapon States would undertake to refrain from the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon States.

Another key issue is the arms race in outer space. In that connection, I wish to refer to resolution 51/44 adopted by the General Assembly at its fifty-first session on prevention of an arms race in outer space and concentration on peaceful uses of outer space. The resolution requests the Conference on Disarmament to re-establish the Ad Hoc Committee on the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space with a negotiating mandate with a

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view to conducting negotiations for the conclusion of an agreement to prevent an arms race in outer space in all its aspects. My country supports the re-establishment of this committee as soon as possible.

Another issue that has begun to attract the attention of the Conference on Disarmament since becoming a talking point in other forums and in the media is that of anti-personnel landmines. I am not here to present a detailed account of the excruciating pain and suffering that have been inflicted by such mines in different countries, and also in our own region, the Middle East, which contains almost half the total number of mines laid throughout the world. The delegation of Iraq believes that this issue cannot be approached in any realistic way without clearly specifying the humanitarian goals and national interests of States as priorities that call for comprehensive disarmament measures. Otherwise, the banning and elimination of mines will remain an unattainable goal and subject to selective interpretations based on circumstantial considerations.

For the adoption of an international instrument, it is essential to specify clearly ways and means of eliminating mines. Moreover, the instrument must be binding on all States, particularly those with large and highly developed industrial and military facilities, in order to control the production and exportation of anti-personnel landmines and prevent their proliferation throughout the world. Those countries must also be involved in their destruction and eradication since they possess the necessary technology and experience and are therefore in a position to offer their assistance, a move that would greatly facilitate the negotiations. The practical implementation of such an international instrument would involve various measures such as the preparation of detailed plans of mined areas and sites, the categories of mines involved and the laying procedures. This preparatory work would facilitate the handling and clearance of mines by means of the advanced detection and clearance technology possessed by a small number of States.

In 1991 Iraq was the victim of a large-scale invasion from which it inherited a large number of mines laid on its territory and coasts. As is known, certain parties tried to clear the mines from part of Iraq's territory, not for purely humanitarian reasons as announced at the time but for overtly political reasons. The invasion left behind an enormous number of unexploded anti-personnel mines. We have been providing the United Nations with details of these mines since 1992. The Iraqi authorities are trying to destroy them because they have claimed many lives among our people and severely damaged their livelihood. This has been confirmed by the report of the United Nations Inter-Agency Humanitarian Programme in Iraq published on 3 April 1996, which stated that landmines have adversely affected agriculture and the daily lives of the Iraqi people.

An international ban on anti-personnel landmines cannot come about through unilateral statements by just a few States. There is a need for the establishment of rules which are consistent with international law applicable in this area. Due regard must also be paid to the circumstances prevailing in different regions, many of which are still involved in conflicts and subject to domination, influence and threats of the use of force against their

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countries and peoples. The assistance in mine-clearing provided by the United Nations is useful but should involve close coordination with the national authorities in the countries concerned and should not undermine their national security or be used to achieve political aims that were not included among the objectives set forth in United Nations resolutions on the matter.

With regard to the ban on fissile materials, we join other delegations in expressing the view that any convention adopted in the future on this subject should cover the production, acquisition and storage of such materials and should contain a definition of fissile materials consistent with that in article 20, paragraph 1, of the Statute of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and specify the armament activities and explosive devices using fissile materials that are to be prohibited with a view to halting the production, acquisition and storage of such materials in nuclear and non-nuclear States. In addition, my delegation considers that the ban on fissile materials used in the manufacture of nuclear weapons should include materials with an enrichment of 20 per cent or above, and that it should cover currently stored materials and future production of such materials for either military or civilian purposes in excess of one kilogram. The materials should be placed under Agency surveillance to prevent their reutilization for military purposes.

We also wish to stress the need for a highly developed international surveillance, verification and safety system, to be implemented by a specialized body associated with the International Atomic Energy Agency and applying the safeguards of the European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM), following the declaration of all stocks of fissile materials in the facilities of nuclear-weapon States and States with advanced nuclear programmes with a view to determining the fate of fissile materials stemming from the dismantling of nuclear weapons and nuclear explosive devices or as yet unused materials. Attention must be paid to fissile materials to ensure that they are used for peaceful purposes throughout the world. The convention should be binding on all States parties, whether or not they are also parties to the NPT. It should also be non-discriminatory, multilateral and universal, and should be provided with effective means of verification. My delegation views this convention as a component of the time-bound programme for the removal and destruction of all nuclear weapons.

Transparency is vitally important and more than necessary in the case of disarmament measures, since it helps to build confidence and dispel excessive doubts. To be effective and comprehensive, such action must follow the correct path, since transparency relates not only to the transfer of conventional weapons but also to non-conventional weapons. As everybody knows, the issue of transparency is closely related to concerns of national security and its preservation, particularly since an impartial observer will not find a single region of the world that is entirely free from tension and conflict. National interest and the acquisition of weapons for self-defence are among the main concerns that affect the positions adopted by countries when it comes to honouring their obligations with respect to disarmament and that determine the degree of frankness and transparency that they reflect. The United Nations Register, relating to conventional arms only, which was established by General Assembly resolution 46/36 L, on which Iraq abstained,

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does not, in our view, meet the security requirements of some countries, particularly in regions where tensions exist, and does not dispel their fears. On the contrary, it intensifies their fears and concerns because a high degree of transparency is in some respects incompatible with national security interests, particularly where there is a major qualitative discrepancy in the categories of weapons - especially nuclear weapons - held by some parties in those regions. This is ultimately conducive to imbalance in terms of demands for transparency and openness because of the lack of balance among the parties in the region where tensions exist.

Iraq, whose implementation of Security Council resolutions concerning weapons of mass destruction was an example of transparency since it presented regular systematic data and statements concerning activities related to such weapons, considers that the measures provided for in the resolution on transparency in the field of disarmament cannot be viewed as a set of effective international measures designed to protect the security of States, enhance their independence and sovereignty, and avert the danger of war and conflict. Accordingly, Iraq, in view of its national security concerns and in the light of its experience, demands that all neighbouring countries in the Middle East comply with the principle of transparency by declaring all their weapons, including weapons of mass destruction and missiles for their delivery.

Before concluding my statement, I wish to mention another important issue, namely the expansion of the Conference on Disarmament. We support steps to open up the Conference to all candidates, since its expansion would broaden the basis of representation so as to reflect the existing membership of the United Nations. However, this move should not impair the general quality and efficiency of the Conference proceedings, which stem from a careful and scrupulous approach to the process of selection and observance of agreed rules and guidelines. In this connection, we welcome the appointment of the Special Coordinator for expansion of membership, the Ambassador of Austria, and wish him success in his work. We trust that he will complete his consultations and present his proposals for a balanced expansion of the membership of the Conference.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the representative of Iraq for his statement and the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of Australia, Ambassador Campbell.

Mr. CAMPBELL (Australia): Madam President, allow me first to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency and on your very commendable efforts to re-energize our Conference for the important tasks it faces. You can rightly claim to have made progress with the appointment of four special coordinators at the end of our second session. As one of those special coordinators, I would like to take this opportunity to present a progress report on my consultations with member States, this in pursuit of the mandate given me by the Conference.

Since my appointment on 26 June I have held over 40 bilateral meetings with members of the Conference on Disarmament. I appreciate the time my colleagues have made available to me as I appreciate the openness with which

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they have discussed the issues. In my meetings with colleagues I have outlined what I see as the four possible options for dealing with the question of APLs in the CD through the establishment of an ad hoc committee.

The first of these options is a comprehensive mandate which would have the CD endorse the objective of working towards an effective global ban on landmines and undertake work on the various aspects of such a ban - production, use, transfers and stockpiles - simultaneously. The Japanese/Hungarian mandate submitted to the Conference early this year is representative of the kind of mandate that might be considered with this objective in mind.

The second alternative, second option, is a comprehensive mandate which affirms an effective global ban as the ultimate objective, but agrees to undertake work towards this goal in a phased or step-by-step approach. The mandate submitted to this Conference by the United Kingdom delegation earlier this year best approximates this objective. A variant of this approach could allow the ad hoc committee, once established, to determine the manner and order in which it would tackle the various aspects of a ban.

A third possible mandate is one which involves a strictly partial approach to the APL problem and would have the Conference establish an ad hoc committee to look at discrete issues such as export, import and transfers and/or verification. Such a mandate would not include a chapeau which had the Conference agree that the total elimination of landmines was its ultimate objective.

The fourth possible mandate is really no mandate at all in the sense that it would have the CD agree to establish an ad hoc committee simply to review and discuss the world situation regarding landmines. I have detected no convergence in support of this option nor is it one which I believe is appropriate for an institution charged with negotiation rather than deliberation, but it is an alternative that has to be considered.

As was only to be expected, the delegations that I have met thus far have expressed a range of views, and as there are still a number of delegations with which I have not yet formally discussed the issue, I am not in a position at this stage to make any recommendation to the Conference.

I have also discussed with delegations the timing of any CD action on landmines. There are some delegations who have expressed the view to me that it would be desirable for the CD to take some decisions on a possible mandate before the end of this current session, but allowing for substantive work to begin only in the new year. Other delegations have pointed out to me the difficulty of the CD taking any decision on a mandate during this its third and last session for obvious reasons, that is, we have little time left to discuss the issue and we have to devote attention to our annual report. Other delegations have pointed out to me, and this is a view that I share personally, that there is little point in the CD taking any decisions on a possible mandate on landmines until the outcome of the Ottawa Process is known in December.

(Mr. Campbell, Australia)

I have no sense that there is any feeling amongst delegations that the CD is in competition with that process, the Ottawa Process, which will take a further step forward when negotiations on a draft treaty commence in Oslo in September. Rather, I have the feeling that delegations would wish to see the outcome of that process before final decisions on how the CD may complement the outcomes of Ottawa, consistent both with the Ottawa treaty outcome itself and consistent with the CD's mandate and status as the international community's standing arms control negotiating body. On the other hand, I have not encountered any opposition from so-called pro-Ottawa delegations to the CD taking up the question of landmines in an appropriate way in a post-Ottawa environment.

This is as much as I have to report at this stage. I am continuing my consultations with a view to completing an initial round of discussion with all States members of the CD within the next two weeks. I note that one regional group has urged me to undertake informal open-ended consultations. At this stage, I believe it is premature for me to do so. I have not ruled out such consultations but I need to have the opportunity to finish the individual discussions with States members. I do, however, agree to make myself available to the regional groups themselves should they wish to discuss the issues with me.

It is my intention to make a further report on my efforts to fulfil my mandate as APL Special Coordinator later in this third session, but I foreshadow that it will most likely be another interim report when I expect I will be seeking the Conference's agreement for me to continue my consultations in the inter-sessional period, that is, between the end of this year's CD session and the commencement of our first session in the new year with a view to my presenting a final report early in our first session in 1998.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the representative of Australia for his statement and the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of Kazakhstan, Mr. Volkov.

Mr. VOLKOV (Kazakhstan) (translated from Russian): Madam President, first of all I would like to congratulate you on taking up the post of President and on your discharge of the high-level and responsible functions entrusted to you. On behalf of the delegation of my country I would like to assure you of my full support.

Today I should like to take this opportunity to inform this august assembly of a statement made by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan in connection with a governmental decree dated 6 August 1997, whereby Kazakhstan declared a ban on the export of anti-personnel landmines, including re-export and transit. Kazakhstan shares the growing concern of the international community at the huge losses caused among the civilian population through the use of anti-personnel mines. In over 70 different countries, 110 million mines are still maiming and killing the civilian population every day. That is why anti-personnel mines have been dubbed delayed-action weapons of mass destruction. This serious problem, which is worldwide in scope, can only find a solution through joint international action to limit the use of anti-personnel mines and access to

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them, and in due course to forbid their use. The unilateral moratorium introduced by the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan provides support for the relevant resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly and is an expression of our country's commitment to the cause of strengthening international peace and security.

I would request the secretariat of the Conference to distribute the statement by the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the subject of anti-personnel landmines as an official document of the Conference on Disarmament.

I would like to take this opportunity of speaking to the Conference on Disarmament today to inform this august assembly that, in pursuance of the process which was begun in February this year in Almaty - I am referring to the Almaty Declaration adopted at the meeting of the Presidents of five Central Asian States proclaiming the movement and the path - the aim of creating a nuclear-free zone in Central Asia - by way of a practical step, an international conference on problems associated with the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons is to be held in Kazakhstan from 8 to 12 September this year, to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Semipalatinsk test site. The conference will open on 8 September in Almaty, the capital of Kazakhstan, and will then continue its work in the city of Kurchatov in Semipalatinsk district, which is where the Semipalatinsk test site used to operate.

The agenda of this international conference includes such issues as the role of international and regional treaties and agreements in guaranteeing the non-proliferation regime, the activities of international organizations intended to support the non-proliferation regime, the system of international guarantees, support for the regime of non-proliferation in the CIS countries, and the last, concluding issue is the creation of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia. The conference will be of a practical, scientific nature. Over a period of four days, the representatives of more than 30 countries in the city of Kurchatov will have an opportunity to participate in visits to the facilities at the former Semipalatinsk test site, hear reports and discussions on practical measures to support the non-proliferation regime, consider the issue of conversion of nuclear testing sites and their infrastructure and assess the effects of nuclear testing on the environment.

Today I would also like to note and express the special satisfaction of the delegation of Kazakhstan and congratulate the Conference on Disarmament on the establishment of the post of Special Coordinator on the question of expansion of the membership of the CD and express our special support for the Ambassador of Austria, Mr. Kreid, who has been appointed to that high-level and responsible post. The delegation of Kazakhstan also considers that in the very near future all the member countries of the CD as well as States with observer status that play an active part in this work will have to accept the obvious need for political and practical support for two parallel processes - the Ottawa process and the Geneva process - not just in respect of anti-personnel mines, to note their positive achievements and, for the sake of the single goal of disarmament and the strengthening of security, to move forward in the run-up to the major conference to be held in Oslo, in Norway.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the representative of Kazakhstan for his statement and the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. ORFI (Syrian Arab Republic) (translated from Arabic): Madam President, I wish to thank the Special Coordinator on anti-personnel landmines, His Excellency the Ambassador of Australia, for his progress report presented at today's meeting. Our delegation wishes to reserve the right to present its comments and remarks on this report after having studied it carefully.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic for his statement. I have no further speakers on my list for today. Do other delegations wish to take the floor at this stage?

In the light of South Africa's decision to waive its right to preside over the Conference, in accordance with the provisions of the rules of procedure, during the period from 18 August to 31 December 1997, and the information received from the representative of Spain to the effect that his country is not in a position to occupy the Chair for that period, and taking account also of the readiness of the delegation of Sri Lanka to shoulder this responsibility, and following intensive consultations, I conclude that the representative of Sri Lanka will take the Chair of the Conference from 18 August until 31 December 1997. This means that the post of President of the Conference for the next session in 1998 will be taken by the following countries: Sweden, Switzerland, the Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey, Ukraine and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

I would now like to pass on to you a few comments as Slovakia's term is drawing to an end. At the time when I took up the post of President of the Conference on Disarmament last June, following on from my friend Ambassador Absa Diallo of Senegal, I was aware of the complexity of the tasks that lay ahead of me and of the particularly difficult situation. I must confess that I had mixed feelings, but above all a great deal of respect for this post. I took the Chair with a firm resolve not to spare any effort to find possible solutions and generally acceptable compromises. Sustained efforts to develop consensus on how to handle the agenda of the Conference were made throughout this period. I myself made use of every opportunity in order to try to move our work forward in this field. Unfortunately, all these efforts have not yet produced a result because of persistent basic differences as to the priority attached by different parties to the items on the Conference's agenda. At the same time, thanks to the efforts of my predecessors in this post and the support and cooperation of all delegations, we were able to designate four special coordinators on anti-personnel mines, the review of the Conference's agenda, the expansion of the Conference and the improved and effective functioning of the CD. We have all witnessed the business-like spirit and energy with which our four coordinators got down to work. The intensification of their consultations, both bilateral and multilateral, and the obvious readiness of delegations to cooperate in this regard, point to progress in the near future. I wish them every success.

(The President)

I wish to convey to you all how grateful I am for the cooperation and support that you have given me during my term. I must confess that there were difficult moments when I was extremely appreciative for your kind support and encouragement. It was a great honour for me to preside over this distinguished body. My thanks go in particular to the group coordinators and the representative of China, who always supported my efforts to secure progress in our substantive work and unfailingly stood ready to assist. I would also like to express my gratitude to the Secretary-General of the Conference, Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, the Deputy Secretary-General, Mr. Abdelkader Bensmail, and all the secretariat for their dedication and efficiency. My thanks go to the interpreters for their excellent work. It only remains for me to wish Ambassador Bernard Goonetilleke of Sri Lanka, my successor in the Chair, a great deal of success in his task and assure him of my full cooperation.

I would like to remind you before adjourning this plenary meeting that the Special Coordinator on the improved and effective functioning of the Conference, Ambassador Mounir Zahran of Egypt, will be holding informal open-ended consultations in this room immediately after this plenary meeting. I would also like to inform you that the Special Coordinator on expansion of the membership of the Conference, Ambassador Kreid, will hold informal open-ended consultations on Tuesday, 19 August at 10 a.m. in this room, and that the Special Coordinator on the review of the agenda, Ambassador Náray, will hold informal open-ended consultations on the same day at 3 p.m. in this room.

The next plenary meeting of the Conference will take place on Thursday, 21 August at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 11.25 a.m.